



Office of School Improvement Newsletter

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Volume 3, Issue 1
Winter 2012-13

Message from the Editors

Mr. Michael L. Hill, PASS Coordinator
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We are very pleased to publish the first of two issues of Volume 3 of the Office of School Improvement (OSI) Newsletter. The newsletter has become a very effective means of communication for our office. We hope that you find the information helpful as we all work together for the benefit of the children we serve. First of all, please help us welcome Ms. Beverly Rabil, priority schools coordinator, as a new member to the OSI team. We are very pleased to have Beverly join our team! This school year has been an extremely busy time for the OSI. The new federally approved flexibility waiver requirements necessitated the development of implementation and monitoring guidelines and procedures as well as ongoing professional development for direct support to 111 divisions and 700 schools. The schools and divisions that we are providing assistance to this year include: those schools performing in the lowest 15% in the Commonwealth (priority and focus); in year 3 of their School Improvement Grant; *Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate*; and Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools that missed an annual measurable objective. All of these qualifying groups have received extensive professional development to assist them in their improvement efforts in responding to the requirements of the new waiver. The OSI is very grateful for the cooperation and support received thus far from all of the divisions and schools. Additionally, since September, extensive training and support has been provided to over 500 schools with school improvement planning using Indistar®. Also, our comprehensive differentiated technical assistance model is fully operational and currently assisting well over 100 divisions and 400 schools. The model design includes a coordinated, high level of communication between all stakeholders. In order to ensure sustainability, the foundation of all technical assistance is capacity building with a focus on process development. This is also true with the "Principals Corner" section. Applying the information from a process perspective and not as a "checklist" will be most beneficial. Also, school and division teams will find a "must read" document from the Academic Development Institute. This document sets the stage for the important work of school improvement planning. Additionally, we are very excited to report the outstanding work of the Intra-agency Technical Assistance Team. Do not miss reading this section as it describes the impact that this team is making in a collaborative effort to address the identified needs of divisions and schools. One could argue that the most important section in this issue is found on page 3. This section identifies the availability of vital resources on the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Web site to assist with the implementation of the new mathematics, writing, reading, and history/science standards. We know that great things can happen for our children when we all work and learn together and are supportive of each other. Please do not hesitate to contact the OSI for assistance!

Important Dates

- 1/18/13 – School- and division-level plans are due via the Indistar® Dashboard
- 1/18/13 – Improvement plan rubrics (completed by the division leadership team) for school-level plans are due via the Indistar® Dashboard for Focus, Tier III schools, schools rated *Accredited with Warning and Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate*, and via Single Sign-On Web Systems (SSWS) for Title I schools missing one or more Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) that are not a focus, priority, nor Tier III school.
- 2/7/13- Session 5 of Indistar® training for schools rated *Accredited with Warning and Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate*
- 2/20/13– All priority schools cohorts training on principal evaluation at The College of William and Mary
- 2/28-3/15/13- Window for school and division teams to submit improvement plans containing quarterly data review comments via the Indistar® Dashboard
- 2/28/13– Second Quarterly Audit Report due from division liaisons via SSWS
- 3/4/13– Division Liaison Meeting at The College of William and Mary
- 3/19/13- Priority Schools Cohort II Mock Board Meeting
- 3/20/13– Priority Schools principal evaluation follow-up (division representatives only)
- 3/21/13-3/22/13– Priority Schools Cohort III Training
- 4/15/13– Year 1 high schools must have reviewed the Eight Elements of High School Improvement Webinar Series
- 4/24/13– Priority Schools Cohort III Training
- 4/25/13– Priority Schools Cohort II Training
- 4/26/13– Priority Schools Cohort I Training

Note: Please see School Improvement and Reform section of the VDOE Web-site for additional information and dates.

School Improvement Planning Update

Each year the OSI provides updates to Indistar® through the Center on Innovations in Learning (CIL). The three new indicators that are required for schools using Indistar®, the OSI has uploaded other documents and report templates that should assist schools and divisions in capturing the work of their teams. In addition to the upgrades to the Indistar® platform, extensive training has been provided to all schools and divisions on school improvement planning (using Indistar®) with a focus on the school improvement process and modeling the development of individual plans. The three new indicators that are required for each school to include in their plan this year include:

TAO1— The school uses an **identification process** (including ongoing conversations with instructional leadership teams and data points to be used) for all students at risk of failing or in need of targeted interventions; **TAO2**—The school uses a **tiered, differentiated intervention process** to assign research-based interventions aligned with the individual needs of identified students (the process includes a description of how interventions are selected and assigned to students as well as the frequency and duration of interventions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students); **TAO3**—The school uses a **monitoring process** (including a multidisciplinary team that meets regularly to review student intervention outcome data and identifies "triggers" and next steps for unsuccessful interventions) for targeted intervention students to ensure fidelity and effectiveness.

Additional information regarding the Indistar® Web-based planning tool is available at <http://www.indistar.org/>.

Office of School Improvement (OSI) Updates

Focus and Tier III Schools

Per the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) flexibility waiver, Title I schools with one or more proficiency gap groups not meeting performance expectations in reading and mathematics were identified for inclusion in the focus school category.

Gap Group 1: Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged (unduplicated))

Gap Group 2: Black students, not of Hispanic origin, including Students with Disabilities, ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged Students

Gap Group 3: Hispanic students, of one or more Races, including Students with Disabilities, ELL, And Economically Disadvantaged Students

Title I schools with one or more proficiency gap groups failing to meet the 95 percent participation rate in reading and/or mathematics were also considered for inclusion in the focus school category. There are currently 72 focus schools representing 48 local educational agencies. On September 17-18, 2012, the OSI hosted a conference for principals and division contact persons associated with identified focus schools. During the conference, participants received information regarding the requirements for school improvement planning, OSI technical assistance opportunities, targeted intervention strategies for students, contractor will work with the division leadership team to provide intensive support to focus school principals and their staff members. In addition, the Differentiated Technical Assistance Team (DTAT) will support these schools through webinars and/or on-site assistance. Please see the School Improvement and Reform page of the VDOE Web site for more information (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/school_improvement/index.shtml).

Priority Schools

All priority schools participated in schools improvement professional development in January. Cohort I schools are presently developing sustainability plans for exit or continuation with reduced funding. In January, division and school teams reflected on structures and processes that have supported improvement efforts and led to increased student achievement. School and division

teams will focus on documenting specific plans for sustaining and continuing improvement in the school's plan on Indistar® in preparation for the April phase out training. Cohort II schools are focusing on student engagement and teacher observation and feedback. During the training, participants visited three classrooms and conducted observations using student engagement and teacher observation tools developed as a part of the School-University Research Network (SURN) Principal Academy. Observation data were shared and analyzed with a focus on high-yield strategies. Administrators role-played giving specific feedback. A special thank you to Prince Edward County Public Schools for hosting Cohort II in their schools for the observations. March training will be "Mock Board Meeting" presentations by each school. Cohort III schools continued a review and discussion of transformational toolkit indicators to be assessed. *Building Autonomy* (Strand B) and *Leading Change* (Strand G) were the objectives for this session. Participants discussed school autonomy and resource alignment, created sample organizational charts, shared quick wins, discussed strategies to communicate change and accountability with stakeholders, created and shared lists noting all types of data meetings held in their schools and shared hurdles they have encountered. March training will focus on *Working with Stakeholders and Building Support for Transformation* (Strand D); *Providing Rigorous Staff Development* (Strand I); and *Reforming Instruction* (Strand K.)

Schools Rated Accredited with Warning and Provisionally Accredited – Graduation Rate

Schools rated *Accredited with Warning and Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate* have made great strides in school improvement planning and implementation. Schools have selected and are implementing an Early Warning System such as VEWS or DataCation to assist them with intervention planning, implementation, and monitoring. Schools have completed four out of five Indistar® training sessions with Dr. Yvonne Holloman, and are progressing well with indicator identification and task development. Twenty-eight (28) schools in their first year rated *Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited– Graduation*

Rate have participated in on-site reviews; the remaining 42 reviews will be completed in January and February. On December 4, 18 school principals participated in Breaking Ranks in the Middle (BRIM) training sponsored by OSI in conjunction with the Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership (VFEL). Thirteen middle schools have received an OSI-sponsored grant to participate in the TenMarks® Math Pilot project, which kicks off this month.

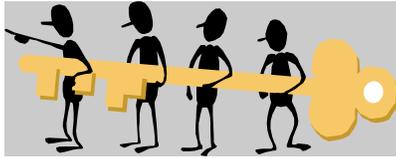
Title I and Non-Title I Schools Missing One or more AMOs and that are fully accredited and neither Focus, Priority, nor Tier III Schools

These schools have been working on required school improvement plans. Title I schools are required to use Indistar® to create the school improvement plan; non-Title I schools may elect to use Indistar® on a voluntary basis. Technical assistance has been provided by division liaisons and by additional contractors for those schools without division liaisons.

Differentiated Technical Assistance Team (DTAT)

The OSI provides direct technical assistance to divisions and schools through the DTAT. Members of this team are retired educators and/or education consultants that are experts in one or more areas of technical assistance. This team of contractors works collaboratively with other VDOE contractors and division staff to help ensure a high level of communication between all stakeholders. As indicated earlier on page 1, during the first semester DTAT has provided support to over 100 divisions and 400 schools. New for this year is a dedicated e-mail address for DTAT, osita@doe.virginia.gov. Please use this e-mail address when requesting support from DTAT.





Virginia Department of Education Intra-agency Technical Assistance Team and Teacher Specific Available Resources

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Intra-agency Technical Assistance Team serves as an important arm of the VDOE Statewide System of Support. The primary role of the team is to assist the OSI with responding to identified technical assistance needs for divisions and schools. Technical assistance needs are supported through a coordinated, differentiated, individualized technical assistance approach. In addition, the team meets several times throughout the year sharing information about resources and technical assistance to better coordinate support from the VDOE. Currently, team participation is at an all-time high with 20 active members representing nine VDOE departments/offices. Team meetings are focused on building VDOE capacity with collaborative and passionate student-centered discussions. The OSI is very appreciative of the dedication and support that has been received as a result of the Intra-agency Technical Assistance Team. Team members include:

Mr. Michael Bolling, Director, Mathematics and Governor's Schools
Ms. Jo Ann Burkholder, Student Assistance Systems Coordinator, OSI
Dr. Cynthia Cave, Director, Office of Student Services
Mr. Jason Ellis, Test Results Utilization, Testing Administration, Scoring & Reporting
Dr. Susan FitzPatrick, Grants and Program Manager, OSI
Ms. Stacy Freeman, Title III ESL Specialist, PAA
Mr. Michael Hill, The Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS) Coordinator, OSI, (Team Chairperson)
Dr. Yvonne Holloman, Division Level Support Coordinator, OSI
Dr. Teresa Lee, Specialist-Learning Disabilities and Attention Disorders, Special Education Instructional Services
Dr. Thomas Manthey, Specialist – Adolescent Literacy, Special Education Instructional Service
Ms. Rebecca Marable, Title I Coordinator, PAA
Mr. Eric Rhoades, Director, Science and Health Education
Ms. Tracy Robertson, English Coordinator, Humanities and Early Childhood
Mr. Thomas Santangelo, English/Reading Elementary, Humanities and Early Childhood
Ms. Amy Siepka, Assessment Development Coordinator, Assessment Development
Dr. Lynn Sodot, Improvement Specialist, OSI
Dr. Kathleen Smith, Director, Office of School Improvement
Dr. Vivian Stith-Williams, Student Services Specialist
Ms. Carol Sylvester, Title II, PAA
Dr. Linda Wallinger, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
Dr. Deborah Wickham, Mathematics - Mathematics—Elementary and Governor's Schools

Important VDOE Resources

The VDOE provides a variety of resources for local educational agencies (LEAs) to use in preparation for the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments.

SOL practice items -

- Provide examples of the new content and increased rigor represented by the revised SOL and illustrate the new Technology-Enhanced Item types for the mathematics, reading, science, and writing SOL tests.
- May be found at the following link: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/index.shtml>

SOL practice items resource page includes -

- Practice items for mathematics, English, and science SOL assessments
- Audio version of practice items for students with accommodation for testing (Individual Education Plan and Section 504 Plans)
- Practice item guides

TeacherDirect -

- Provides a way to share new instructional resources created by VDOE staff as well as make teachers aware of professional development and grant opportunities, and other information of special interest to teachers and their students. This is an awesome resource for classroom teachers!
- The **TeacherDirect** resources may be found at the following link: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/teacher_direct/index.shtml. Teachers may subscribe to TeacherDirect by clicking on this link: [Subscribe to TeacherDirect Weekly Updates](#) 

Mathematics, English and Language Arts, and Science Updates

- Michael Bolling, director, Office of Mathematics and Governor's Schools, Tracie Robertson, English coordinator, Humanities and Early Childhood, and Eric M. Rhoades, director, Office of Science and Health Education offer regular updates for teachers and school communities. Updates are sent to respective division contacts for distribution to teachers. They offer up to date information specific to classroom instruction. Teachers will find these updates to be extremely helpful in preparing students for SOL assessments.



Principals' Corner

School improvement is a PROCESS not a checklist of activities. Align these principal-specific actions to help drive the school improvement PROCESS in your school.

Every Month

>> **Conduct** monthly meeting with the school leadership and improvement team. (review progress of school improvement plan (SIP) on Indistar®; review current intervention data on all Tier 2 and Tier 3 students (including Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners) and other school data; review school Indistar® dashboard for reports due dates; status of all technical assistance and upcoming professional development; make needed revisions; post progress monitoring notes, agendas, and minutes).

>> **Observe** classroom instruction and conduct follow-up conferences with teachers (review lesson plan to ensure planning matches what is being taught; schedule peer observations and assign professional development as necessary).

>> **Review and monitor** weekly lesson plans for all teachers—plans must include evidence of application of VDOE Web site resources for writing, English, mathematics, and science; evidence of collaborative planning with the special education teacher, if appropriate.

>> **Review** all classroom teacher formative assessments to ensure curriculum map alignment, lesson plan alignment, and SOL test format including regular practice with technology-enhanced test items and writing SOL requirements.

>> **Conduct** instructional walkthroughs with the school leadership team to include division personnel noting instructional areas of strength and addressing areas needing improvement.

>> **Conduct** monthly staff meeting with a focus on instructional practices; review/update of Indistar® SIP; update on all technical assistance and professional development activities; update on school safety procedures/crisis plan.

>> **Conduct** monthly administrative meeting with grade-level/content area teams to discuss individual student progress (all students); discuss referrals to Student Intervention Team where necessary; all support staff attend to include guidance.

>> **Conduct** principal-led parent outreach initiative to increase active involvement and communication

>> **Develop and distribute** school monthly newsletter and calendar of activities for the upcoming month to all staff members, students, and parents.

>> **Maintain** updated school-wide calendar showing all school related activities for the month. Post where all staff can view.

January

>> Review report cards providing written feedback to teachers and positive and encouraging comments to students.

>> Following division procedures, develop and monitor performance improvement plans for teachers whose performance fails to meet expectations.

>> Identify staff members whom you will not recommend for contract renewal. Collaborate with your immediate supervisor and the human resources department to prepare the appropriate documentation adhering to reporting timelines as directed.

>> Initiate school-developed retention procedures and guidelines timeline. (Begin meetings with teachers regarding their tentative retention lists; supports needed for individual student success, and procedures for notifying parents of the possibility of retention.)

>> Conduct mid-year meeting with students to reinforce school-wide academic expectations and to review the school's Code of Conduct with an emphasis on the most commonly cited infractions at the school. All staff should attend.

>> Plan a quarterly school celebration for students, staff, and parents.

February

>> Complete quarterly report form on Indistar® dashboard.

>> Meet with staff members regarding the upcoming SOL Writing Test. (Conduct meeting with grade teachers and proctors regarding testing procedures reinforcing the computer use requirement and VDOE available resources including practice level prompts; distribute parent letters and testing schedule ; develop incentive plan for students; schedule individual student conferences to provide support and build confidence.)

>> Begin developing a six-week instructional plan to begin prior to spring testing with a focus on individual student needs.

>> Conduct a quarterly school celebration for students, staff, and parents.

March

>> Finalize a six-week instructional plan targeting specific individual student needs in preparation for spring testing (to be implemented and monitored during the six weeks prior to testing).

>> Plan transition program for rising sixth/ninth grade students that includes staff from elementary, middle, and high school.

>> Plan a quarterly school celebration for students, staff, and parents.



Frequently Asked Questions About the Indistar® Web-based Planning Tool

Tasks/Indicators

Q: How many rapid improvement school indicators should be included in a school's plan?

A: The number of indicators will vary based on the school's status:

Focus schools – Five indicators are required including the three required indicators (TA01, TA02, and TA03).

Schools rated *Accredited with Warning* – The three required indicators (TA01, TA02, and TA03) must be included as well as any additional indicators that are aligned with the Essential Actions from the academic review report.

Q: What is the process for removing specific indicators or tasks?

A: Indistar® is a continuous improvement process and is not designed for indicators to be removed.

When a school/division leadership team makes the decision to discontinue work with a specific indicator, then comments to this effect should be made in the *Monitoring the Plan* component of the Indistar® Web-based planning tool. Retaining indicators and tasks enable the school/division team to keep a historical record of all previous school improvement efforts. Please contact Dr. Yvonne Holloman (Yvonne.Holloman@doe.virginia.gov), not the Center on Innovations in Learning (CIL), to discuss any issues related to removal of indicators.

Q: My school/division leadership team has completed several indicators, but they continue to be displayed as a part of the improvement plan. Will CIL remove "old" indicators?

A: Indistar® is premised on the concept of continuous improvement; therefore, it is imperative for all work to be displayed so that everyone is able to view the "historical record" of improvement efforts at the school- or division-level.

Updating an Improvement Plan

Q: May my school/division team continue our work with an indicator if all tasks have been completed?

A: Yes. Your team would need to update information in the *Create School Plan* component of the main menu by changing the indicator's target date and adding new tasks. You may also update your description of what the objective (indicator) will look like when it is fully implemented.

Q: What is the process for editing/revising information (i.e. , tasks, dates) included in the school improvement plan?

A: Any information entered into the school improvement plan may be edited/revised at any time by revisiting the *Create School Plan* component of the main menu, and editing the appropriate components.

Q: My school/division leadership team has completed several indicators, but they continue to be displayed as a part of the improvement plan. Will CIL remove "old" indicators?

A: Indistar® is premised on the concept of continuous improvement; therefore, it is imperative for all work to be displayed so that everyone is able to view the "historical record" of improvement efforts at the school- or division-level.

Monitoring an Improvement Plan

Q: How often should the school team enter comments about tasks into the *Monitor School Plan* component of the main menu?

A: In an effort to ensure that tasks are monitored in a timely manner, comments should be entered on a monthly basis.



Frequently Asked Questions About the Indistar® Web-based Planning Tool

Entering Data

Q: What type of data should a school team enter into the Assessment component of the main menu?

A: Formative data associated with tasks included in the improvement plan must be entered into the *Assessment* component of the main menu. Please **do not** enter benchmark or SOL data.

Submitting Forms

Q: One of the schools in my division has completed a form on the Indistar® Dashboard, but I am unable to view it using the division's password. What should I do?

A: Forms that are posted on a school's dashboard will not be visible to anyone entering the Indistar® Web site using the division's password until after the school has **saved** the form. Once a school has entered and saved any information in the form, the form will be visible to the division team.

Q: I submitted a form on the Indistar® Dashboard by mistake. What should I do?

A: The school principal should send an e-mail to Dr. Yvonne Holloman (Yvonne.Holloman@doe.virginia.gov) requesting that the "Submit" button be reset.

Q: I have entered information into Indistar® for one of the schools in my division that I supervise. However, I am unable to save the information. What should I do?

A: Indistar® is designed for all school-related information to originate from the school. If someone attempts to enter information using an access-level other than the school's, then the information will not be saved or the user will be unable to enter information. A red message at the top of each page will alert the user to this restriction.

2012-2013 School Improvement Plan Requirements

Improvement Planning Requirements	
Focus Schools	Indistar® required • Three required targeted intervention indicators required
Priority Schools	Indistar® required • Transformation Toolkit or Lead Turnaround Partner indicators required
Schools rated Accredited with Warning Schools rated Provisionally Accredited	Indistar® required • Three required targeted intervention indicators required
Title I Schools that did not meet an AMO	Indistar® required • Three required targeted intervention indicators required
Non-Title I Schools that did not meet an AMO	Locally-developed school improvement plan required



A Different Kind of Work

Academic Development Institute—Maureen Mirabito and Sam Redding

Think of a time you earned something. Really earned it. Succeeded.

Chances are you didn't *will* success; you worked at it. Hard. You focused your time (more in some areas than in others) and your effort (a little more here, a lot more there). You started early and ended late because you had a new idea or maybe just a strong conviction for making it happen. You probably got the people around you involved and even a bit excited. They showed you a way you hadn't thought of; you showed them that their way mattered.

Success in improving districts and schools works the same way. Students learn more (and better) when people in the school focus their time and effort on elevating their specific teaching, leading, connecting, and learning skills. They work hard at it. They get others involved and excited to do the same.

Soon, they are not just people in a school. They are *the team of the school*. Maybe the Leadership Team directs the action, but the whole school *becomes* a team. The performance of every player counts.

Indistar® is premised on the understanding that districts and schools improve and succeed when three things are present and balanced: 1) specific expectations for professional practice; 2) personal investment and engagement to improve the school (i.e. student learning); 3) a climate of candor and trust. Candor means unadorned honesty in examining the professional practice of everyone. Trust is the assurance that the candor is aimed at helping everyone improve in order to achieve the best results for students.

Indistar® has simplified and organized the research, translated it into clear statements of effective professional practice (skills), and built a platform where school and district teams can prioritize the skills (what will have the greatest impact immediately), create action steps for making them happen (who will do what and when), and communicate progress around them (here's what's working, here's where we need to do better). It doesn't *do* the work of district or school improvement for you, but it makes it easier for you to prioritize the work, communicate it, and stay on top of it. Considering the amount of distractions that creep up in a school day (okay, a school hour) that kind of support is critical.

Skills + Indicators of Effective Practice

Indistar® is built upon a specific set of practices (or skills routinely exercised) that people must elevate and apply diligently to successfully improve the school. They are called indicators of effective practice (note the *indi* in Indistar®). An indicator of effective practice is a concrete, behavioral expression of a professional practice that contributes to student learning, supported by research. It is expressed in plain language so that a school team can answer easily and with certainty whether it is present or not present. The less gray area the better.

Likened to the concept of "drilling down"—moving through a hierarchy of information from the top, downwards into levels of greater detail—indicators of effective practice are the deep, specific expressions of effective practice. They are what effective practice "looks like."

For example, the functions of districts and schools are often broadly categorized into domains: Leadership and Decision-Making, Curriculum and Instruction, and Culture and Community. At the school level, Curriculum and Instruction might be further sub-divided into categories such as Alignment, Classroom (Formative) Assessment, Differentiated Instruction, Periodic (Benchmark) Assessment, Instructional Delivery, Communication with Parents and Homework, and Classroom Management. This more detailed set of sub-categories fleshes out the school's functions allowing people and teams to see their relationships.

But large domains and categories are still a couple levels away from understanding the practices that are most effective within the functions. For example, under alignment we might find an effective practice such as *Engage teachers in aligning instruction to standards and benchmarks*. We can logically connect this practice to desired outcomes in student learning.

But we can (and should) dig even deeper: if we are to sharpen our skills and improve (really improve), we need indicators of effective practice that "show" what the alignment looks like and how it is achieved. We need specifics.

For example, *Instructional Teams develop standards-aligned units of instruction for each subject and grade level* would be *one* indication that teachers are engaged in effective alignment.

Other indicators might include: *Units of instruction include standards-based objectives and criteria for mastery*. And *Objectives are leveled to target learning to each student's demonstrated prior mastery based on multiple points of data (i.e., unit tests and student work)*.



A Different Kind of Work (cont'd)

Of course, other effective practices and their indicators would provide guidance for Instructional Teams and the nature of their work. Several indicators would clarify the specific meaning of the practice and would serve as behavioral guideposts for individual teachers in fully implementing the practice. The relationships among practices and indicators are important; some are building blocks for others. Specificity matters.

The interrelationship of effective practices and their indicators matters. Ensuring that everyone (everyone) routinely exercises the practice matters.

Assessing Skills + Performance

A skill requires both underlying knowledge and ability to execute. Degrees and certifications may attest to the underlying knowledge of staff; a Leadership Team's nod that the skill is routinely exercised is the premier validation of excellence. This happens when the district or school a) takes responsibility for its own advancement, b) candidly (and routinely) appraises its *own* professional performance (what the adults do), and c) works hard and works together to focus on and improve upon a specific set of skills and their routine application among staff, *among the team of the district or school*.

Put succinctly: "...formalization and specificity are needed for performance management to be practical for employee development and effective for organizational performance" (Frear & Paustian-Underdahl, 2011). The angel is in the details, so to speak.

Heath and Heath (2010) explain the importance of specificity in the job of the school leader: "Many leaders pride themselves on setting high-level direction: *I'll set the vision and stay out of the details*. It's true that a compelling vision is critical. But it's not enough. Big-picture, hands-off leadership isn't likely to work in a change situation, because the hardest part of change—the paralyzing part—is precisely in the details. (p.53) "

The Indistar® system guides school or district Leadership Teams in making an informed assessment of very specific indicators of effective practice and their current level of implementation: 1. Do we have the skills? 2. Do we demonstrate the ability to execute the skills? 3. Do we execute them routinely? 4. Do we execute them flawlessly?

The Leadership Team's assessment process within Indistar® is informed by links to briefs of the underlying research (*Wise Ways*) and examples of implementation. Web-based modules, *Indicators in Action*, provide real-life video demonstration of the indicators by school leaders, teacher teams, teachers, and parent leaders. The video demonstrations are explained by a narrator and through video interviews with the personnel included in the demonstrations. Facilitator guides and workbooks accompany the modules for use in professional development. Emphasis is placed upon universal and routine execution of multiple indicators of effective practices.

The Indistar® system links the school, district, and state, so that coaches can review the work of the team and provide on-going and regular support. Reports on plans, activities, and progress are generated by district and school teams and submitted electronically to the state, replacing previously required paper plans. Because the system utilizes a continuous improvement process, the plans span annual reporting dates and remain in effect until the team provides evidence of full implementation of the indicators. Over time, the cycle is repeated to ensure that practices have become, school-wide routine, and consistent/flawless.

Innovation + Creative License

Indistar is a tool for district and school improvement. It guides the process, keeps it moving, and focuses the teams on specific areas to improve so that *their* time can be spent assembling the solutions, innovating the approaches.

While indicators of effective practice are necessary and useful tools for improvement, the real change happens (and sticks) when the people, *the teams*, have clarity of purpose (why are we here, what will we achieve) and understand the unique contributions they bring to the work (what is my value). Understanding of what effective practice looks like is one thing; giving people the flexibility to determine how they will apply the practice and achieve results gets you closer to the tipping point—when the changes/excellence becomes *the way*—and faster.

When you focus people and teams around specific skills (which Indistar does), enthusiasm and belief widens (we can do this!). Ideas begin to form (what do you think about this?). Ideas lead to a discovery that, through innovation, is adapted or refined for specific uses or in particular contexts (Manzi, 2012; Gertner, 2012). Each team achieves excellence by creatively bringing everyone to a high level of professional practice.



A Different Kind of Work (cont'd)

Building Capacity, Fostering Trust

Change induces risk, and in a climate of change, people are pushed to step beyond their comfort zones. They become uncertain of their reciprocal relationships with colleagues when roles shift and expectations vary. Trust is the antidote for unhealthy aspects of risk. As James Coleman (1990) notes, trust is critical in situations in which “the risk one takes depends on the performance of another actor” (p. 91). Each person must trust not only the other person’s “willingness or intention to keep the trust, but ability to do so” (p. 96). That means that each person must be confident of the other’s capacity (competency) to meet the new expectations introduced by change. In education, the capacity of personnel to confidently and competently implement the change is critical, as is—at the classroom level of innovation—the student’s preparation for its effective application. Building each person’s competence (application of knowledge and skill) enhances the level of trust requisite to innovation. The performance of every player counts. Indistar helps everyone keep an eye to routine performance of critical skills, building capacity, fostering trust. The web-based system’s transparency means there are no hidden agendas. Transparency also fosters trust.

Putting It All Together

Indistar® is useful because it has taken the best of research and turned it into simple, actionable language that people can understand and implement. It is web-based, so teams can input, track, and monitor progress in real-time. It is efficient, allowing schools and districts to design and submit relevant and useful reports specific to their needs and to those whom they are accountable. It is humble, populated with the teaching, leading, and learning skills (the what) that have proven time and time again to improve performance, but taking a backseat to the creativity, ingenuity, and experience of the educators who will implement them (the how).

Indistar® is useful for all of these reasons (and so many more that you will discover as you use it with greater candor, trust, and high expectation). But Indistar works because of the people, the teams, who work hard at examining their individual and collective practice so that students can learn more (and better). Who focus their time (more in some areas than in others) and their effort (a little more here, a lot more there) to perfect their skills and help students perfect theirs. Indistar works because of the people, the teams, who start early and end late because they have a new idea or a problem to solve and a strong conviction for getting it right

Indistar® works because the people who use it work. Smartly. Creatively. Enthusiastically.

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VDOE assists chronically low-performing schools and school divisions to implement effective instructional strategies to increase student growth. The Office of School Improvement has developed a nationally-recognized comprehensive support system that focuses on building division-level capacity to support schools in need of interventions.



The OSI would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their support. We could not do it without them!

Casenex LLC (DataCation)
Division and School Personnel
Edvantia
Editure
Hanover Research
OSI Contractors
School-University Research Network (SURN)—College of William and Mary
TeacherStudio
The Center on Innovations in Learning (CIL)
The College of William and Mary
The National High School Center
The Virginia Association for Elementary School Principals (VAESP)
The Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership (VFEL)

The ultimate goal in school improvement is for the people attached to the school to drive its continuous improvement for the sake of their own children and students.

- Dr. Sam Redding, 2009